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cw/gittlin

Notes on The Middle of the End of Communism, Peace and Democracy News, Winter-spring 1990.

The approach of the Second International, the "slow parliamentary road to socialism," stood condemned as "helpless against the nationalist spasm of World War I,..."

The "nationalism" that emerged as the socialist parties voted for war credits to fight workers of other nations was seen in the context of imperialism, supposedly a stage of capitalism, and of international war. Did the communists of the Third International really appreciate nationalism as a factor that contributed separately to imperialism, that did not derive particularly from capitalism, and that could tear apart a socialist state or empire?

--Why did not the dynamics of revolution in China evolve as in Rumania? Because Rumania came after--and is next to--Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany revolutions? What if the Chinese uprising had come after these in East Europe, and had been informed of the course of events there? Do the Chinese yet have a clear picture of what has happened in East Europe? (Apparently the Cubans don't, yet, at least from their own media. I presume the Nicaraguans did; could that have affected their voting?!)

--1989 shows the existence of a "movement for democracy." "1989 has been the 1968 of the Communist world." (21 years later; that suggests that the movement in the West in 1968 planted a seed in the Communist world, which 21 years later has reached maturity and is ready to vote."

--Those who see the prospect of American military superiority, after Reagan's programs (actually, Carter's!--but call it Reaganism) as having "forced" Gorbachev to yield, overlook that an even greater superiority in the early Sixties--one great enough to achieve the victory in CII for which Reagan is nostalgic--led to Brezhnev's arms buildup, and did not prevent Czechoslovakia or the Vietnam War.

(A Reaganite might answer: the Soviets couldn't do that again, pile up another trillion dollars worth of defense on top of the last trillion, the way we--supposedly--could. Could we, really? Or was SDI a bluff, like Cuba II?!

Need for (Mark Sommer) a Committee on the Present Opportunity: pressing for deep, fast cuts in defense spending, and redirection of investment of budget and resources, of attention, concern,

priorities. McNamara started off talking of cutting budget in half by the mid-90s; now he seems to have retreated to doing this by the end of the century. The difference must be about half a trillion dollars. (check) Nothing could be more rewarding politically than to have McNamara and Kaufmann and Korb acknowledge publicly that the Kaufmann program of reducing by the end of the decade was designed before the events of the fall, and that a 5 year plan (3 year plan? 2? Everyone agrees that one year is too fast! But note the difference between doing it in 3 years versus 5!

Bagdikian thinks that Bush wants to postpone "big" reductions and redirection till the election year. But that probably presumes reductions that are not really that big, compared to the opportunity! If he started on the process of halving the defense budget right now, he would be reaping big benefits by election year 1992. (On the other hand, Halperin argues that then he would have no excuse to hold down spending on domestic welfare programs! Can't this motivation be forced out into the open? Do the Democrats really join him in this?!)

--If "the Left" is unable to specify and enthusiastically fight for better or less bad forms of capitalism--forms that have actually existed and have been shown to be viable, to work, not purely hypothetical constructions distant from any experience--as alternatives to the discredited centralized state socialism, then the only spokesmen for practical alternatives will be those who are currently defining market economies and capitalism as only, or optimally, unregulated, monetarist, Reaganite-Thatcherite-Friedmanite: the IMF credo (mainly applied to the Third World, helpless to resist).

Thus the whole burden of reconstruction will be on the backs of the workers and poor. (What do Swedish and Austrian and German Social Democrats have to say about possible alternative policies for East Europe and the SU? Should not this situation bring about a resurgence of the Socialist International? --rather than lead to activism only in the "capitalist international"? (What lessons does the SI draw from "1989"? Perhaps some rethinking is in order about the ultimate goals toward which they are striving, and the "essence of socialism" and of "social democracy"? A new look at Kautsky and Bernstein is in order (rather than Trotsky!) What does Wallerstein think now: and his school?

What happens to the anticommunist Social Democrats and Socialists "without Communism to kick around any more" or to fear? Pickus?

--The fact is--though few are mentioning it--that the IMF-type "reconstruction" that the Third World and the Second World is heading for is a recipe for military authoritarian regimes, not democracy: Chile, Brazil, Argentina...the Latin Americanization of East Europe and Russia?

Would the First World really be unhappy to see that? Would Bush? Would the banks? (Note the admiration for Chile that Jerry Sanders found, at Citibank).

The rationale could be not only labor unrest--and the need for labor "discipline" as well as order--but nationalism and ethnic conflicts, as well as national and ethnic pride as a substitute for lost socialist ideology and empire.

Is the potential for this really being seen by anyone? (Especially as the real New Economic Policies go into gear!) Hardly anyone, after all, is aware of the correlation between IMF policies and military regimes that I found for Latin America. Nor is almost anyone defining alternatives to these policies! The exception is Greider's brief sketches, mostly in footnotes, of possible alternatives to the Fed's domestic policies. [Greider needs to do a comparable job on the IMF, and apply results to the present situation. Moreover, those radical study groups who have focussed on the IMF need to extrapolate their results to the Second World, rapidly!]

Leftists are at a loss in this generation in large part because of having ignored the problem of inflation, and having no answer to it. That was true in various "progressive" Third World regimes, such as Chile under Allende (see papers by one of his economic officials). It is a flaw inherent in a Marxist perspective, which decries the "money illusion." (But it also applies to liberal Democrats, New Deal Keynesians...). New radicalism must take money and finance seriously and have effective answers to problems of debt, international finance and credit, exchange rates and inflation.

Along with nationalism, and ethnic pride and resentment.

And masculine violence, socialised and hormonal.

--The answer suggested by the ruling ethos in the US and UK is almost surely wrong everywhere: an economy and politics of capitalism without unions, without popular associations and parties aimed at regulating and restraining markets and shaping popular and elite values (as in Sweden). The "frame" that has been crucial in Latin America and monetarist First World regimes is that "unions cause inflation." This can and must be challenged.

In discrediting Lenin, ruling elites seek (and are succeeding) to discredit liberalism, the New Deal, Keynes, social democracy, the welfare state, and really, to return to the period pre-Marx, i.e., pre-1848! Away with child labor laws, let alone environmental protection! (It was those conditions, before unionization and Progressivism, that encouraged hope in Marxism--and that encourage resort to revolutionary Leninism in the Third

World today, as in Nicaragua or El Salvador or Guatemala! These are non-industrial states, but part of unregulated capitalism!

--A challenge is to find ways to protect health, housing, education, and the environment in the context of reconstruction and development in a market economy. To regard the Leninist way as the only way to do this is no longer viable, and was never plausible. Yet these values are genuinely threatened, unless a new way of &guarding them within poor, developing, capitalist economies is advanced, and fought for. (The same aims are appropriate for the rich US, too!) "Overthrowing capitalism" in the sense of abolishing private property, forbidding profit-making, eliminating wage-labor, or forbidding party politics, no longer are remotely plausible ways of achieving these goals or achieving development (especially in the context of US policy and determination--as the case of Nicaragua shows--but even without that).

--Get the old gang together: Gittlin, Scott, Sanders; Klare! Sherman; (Socialist Review?) Hertsgaard; Dowd! (Kornhauser? Epstein? plus Mark Sommers? Kull? Holdren?) "Across Frontiers"; Deirdre English? Adam Hochschild? Mother Jones?

In East: Paine; Klare; Forsberg; IPS; WPI; Landy; Rockefeller? Zinn; Chomsky? South End; In These Times; Johnstone; Coffin; Kehler; Falk;